NSC BRIEFING: LAOS INFORMATION

6 May 1953

- 1. Latest reports on the military situation in Laos give a somewhat less pessimistic picture than that of a week ago.
 - a. The invasion of Laos involved three Viet Minh divisions and elements of a fourth.
 - Now two of these divisions are withdrawing to Tonkin.
 - c. In Luang Prabang the French have 4,000 men in five battalions.
 - d. Only five Viet Minh battalions are known to be nearby.
 - e. At the Plaine des Jarres, the French have seven well-entrenched battalions (about 5,600).
 - f. Viet Minh strength there is believed to be one division (about 10,000), but they could over-run the French only at great cost.
 - g. Recent reports say some Viet Minh elements are moving south toward Paksane or Vientiane.



TOP SECRET-

h. Paksane is defended by three battalions,
 Vientiane by two, in both cases mostly Laotian.



2. The bulk of the Viet Minh forces remained in

Tonkin and are a serious threat to French defenses
in the Delta.

- a. They could also attack the French garrison at
 Na San which is still dependent on supply by air.
- b. Guerrilla fighting inside the Delta continues at a high rate.
- 3. The whole fighting area, however, will be drenched by rain in about ten days.
 - a. This will continue all summer and severely hamper military operations.
 - b. Probably the Viet Minh never planned to go as far as we feared and is now stopping to prepare for next fall's campaign.
- 4. The Viet Minh, without advancing farther, has now won an important strategic military victory.
 - a. The enemy is now established on several important Mekong tributaries.



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- b. It already controlled the Red River drainage system in Tonkin.
- c. Now large supplies can be built up in either or both areas for future drives against the dispersed French forces.



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- 5. Great political gains have also accrued from the Communist successes in Laos.
 - a. Viet Minh followers have been given a big morale uplift.
 - b. French-Laotian relations have been strained by French failure to appeal the aggression to the UN.
 - c. Laotian confidence in the French has been shaken by the French inability to defend their country.
 - d. Probably taking advantage of the Laotian situation, the King of Cambodia recently threatened revolt unless the French gave his country virtual independence.
 - e. He thus suddenly became a national hero with the support of all Cambodian leaders.



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- f. The French are offering some concessions which will be grudgingly accepted but will not eliminate the basic frictions here.
- g. In Vietnam, Viet Minh prestige is much greater and Vietnamese nationalists are comparing Bao Dai's inertia unfavorably with the strong stand taken by the Cambodian King.







- 6. The French have failed to take advantage of the opportunity offered to disprove Viet Minh propaganda that it is fighting a civil war against French imperialism.
 - a. Last week the French appointed die-hard colonnal administrators as High Com-missioners to the three Indochinese states.
 - b. This was a step backwards in the struggle to get the nationalistic Vietnamese to support the war effort.

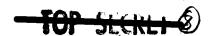




SECURITY INFORMATION

- 7. The Thais are greatly concerned over a possible uprising of the 50,000 Vietnamese in north

 Thailand to join the invaders of Laos.
 - a. That leaders are disturbed that the West may not fully understand the threat to their country.
 - b. Phibun is also worried that the attack on
 Laos is somehow connected with the newly
 established Thai Autonomous Government
 in south Yunnan.



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- 8. The Chinese Communists, who may be master-minding all these developments, have remained well in the background.
 - a. They are sending supplies across the border to the Viet Minh at a faster rate than several months ago.
 - b. Until the middle of last week they took no public note of the invasion of Laos.
 - c. Now they describe it, as Vi et Minh propaganda does, as the work of a Laotian People's Liberation Army.



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SECURITY INFORMATION

- 9. They have recently made sharp propaganda attacks on Thailand which they accuse of sending troops into Laos to help the French.
 - Undoubtedly this line is intended to discourage the Thais from doing anything to aid the French.
 - b. Certainly the Chinese Communists would like to see the government of Thailand overthrown.
 - c. However, they don't seem to be planning any immediate action to this end.
 - d. The Communists in the Far East like to work through native "Liveration" armies.
 - e. As yet there is no "liveration" movement in Thailand for them to support.



